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Seniors care home proposal raises ire

Sentinel Hill neighbours oppose proposed 103-bed facility

[Jeremy Shepherd](#) / North Shore News

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A cadre of outraged citizens stayed in West Vancouver council chambers until 11:30 p.m. Monday in a failed attempt to kibosh a proposed seniors centre.

Maison Senior Living has submitted a design for a three-storey, 103-bed facility which would include a floor for seniors with memory problems such as dementia.

The centre would be located on five lots currently zoned for singlefamily housing on Keith Road and Taylor Way.

Council voted 6-1 to push the project forward, which will likely result in public hearings followed by council consideration.

Rezoning those lots would irreparably damage the fabric of the community while bringing more traffic to a gridlockprone neighbourhood, according to the vast majority of speakers at Monday's council meeting.

According to a survey conducted by members of the Sentinel Hill Neighbourhood Committee, 329 neighbours oppose the project while only three support the centre.

Property values are bound to take a tumble, according to George Deng, who estimated his house would lose \$200,000 in value.

"All the neighbours are losing money. It's almost the same as everyone close to it writing a cheque to subsidize this project," he said.

Deng said he fled from China and its one-child policy.

"I made a decision: no one can kill my girl," he said.

Deng promised his family that moving to a free country would be the best decision he made in his life, but the prospect of the seniors centre has complicated his choice.

"If I fail, if my neighbours fail, I don't know how to tell my girl in the future 'I made the right decision,'" he said, receiving applause from many in attendance.

After looking over assessments of homes near other care centres, Gambioli said housing prices are unlikely to dip.

"There is absolutely no discernible difference in the assessment of the homes which are either adjacent to the care centre. ... and homes that are half a block away or across the street," she said.

Her position was challenged by Andrew Franks, who interrupted council's debate to make his case.

"I have the proof. Are you denying the proof?" he asked.

"I'm denying your right to speak," Mayor Michael Smith replied.

Seniors facilities are good neighbours, according to Smith, who lives by the West Vancouver Care Centre.

"I would say to the residents: you should be careful what you wish for because if five single-family lots go in there, you're going to have every tree taken down and you're going to have five monster houses."

Many speakers said they supported care facilities for seniors, but not there. However, there may be no place to move the facility that won't result in similar objections in the name of neighbourhood character, according to Smith.

"We have no more land," Smith said. "All of these necessary facilities that we need. ... they're going to have to go somewhere on an existing piece of property. There is no other alternative."

Council should discuss seniors housing with representatives from Vancouver Coastal Health to gauge community need, according to Smith.

The centre is very much needed, according to Trudy Hubbard, chairwoman of North Vancouver Kiwanis Housing.

While trying to find housing for North Shore seniors, Hubbard said she frequently sees a dearth of options in West Vancouver.

"Two years ago there was a study, and four per cent of West Vancouver residents are seniors over 85. Where are they to go?" she asked.

Many speakers said Maison's prices are far too high.

"Not all individuals will be able to afford this facility," Hubbard said. "That leaves the space for the ones of us who can't afford that to go into another facility."

The design includes setbacks ranging from 8.9 to 14.5 metres. However, the setback on the building's east side is 4.5 metres, directly affecting neighbour Andrew Franks.

"That's 20 feet less than the length between a pitcher's mound and home plate. How could that not be intrusive?" he asked.

Approving the project in the midst of single-family neighbourhoods would be a "monumental error in judgment," according to Franks.

Other speakers, some who had been on the losing end of the debate over the Grosvenor development in Ambleside, discussed waning faith in council and a growing belief the district's planning department operates on behalf of developers.

Suggesting the process has been unfair is "patently absurd," according to Coun. Craig Cameron.

Cameron took issue with insults alleging impropriety lobbied at district staff.

"Ad hominem attacks against staff and council and wild conspiracy theories are not doing your case any favours. Quite frankly, some of the comments tonight were offensive, and I wouldn't take them if they were said to my face outside the council chamber," he said.

Only one councillor opposed the development.

"It should be stopped in its tracks before it goes to a public hearing," Coun. Bill Soprovich said. "It's a precious place for many people. I just think the project is too big for the particular site."

Council should consider district-wide ramifications, according to Mark Coleman.

"The neighbourhood may be, in this case, secondary to the needs of the greater community," he said.

Coun. Trish Panz supported moving the project forward, citing a need for broader input.

"I do actually represent the entire community," she said. "This is really a need-driven care facility, and I think there's some merit with that in the community."

The 16-metre structure would cover about 40 per cent of its 1.6-acre site. The building is designed to sink into the slope to reduce the look of the massing.

The facility also includes a two-storey dining area that would include a theatre, lounge and a winding staircase.

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